

When Crisis Occurs

A Quick Reference for Parents

A crisis or safety concern may occur at any time in our community or in neighboring communities. Children may be confused and/or frightened by information they hear in conversations and in news reports, and they will look to adults for guidance as to how to react. The following quick reference offers parents suggestions for establishing a sense of security and safety to help their children cope in a crisis situation. Additionally, following a crisis, the school psychologist, school social worker, school counselors, and members of the school division's Critical Incident Team are available to assist students.

Emotional Support:

- Limit the amount of exposure your child has to newspapers and televised news reports. Repetitive discussion of the situation may re-traumatize a child.
- Be honest with your children about what has occurred and provide facts about what has happened. Use age appropriate terms for better understanding.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about his or her feelings and concerns. Share your feelings with your child.
- Reassure your child that he/she is safe.
- Spend extra time with your child, especially doing something fun or relaxing for both of you.
- Remember the importance of touch. A hug can reassure your child that he/she is loved.
- Watch for ongoing signs of difficulty, which could indicate that your child may need additional help. Some warning signs are: withdrawal from social contact, change in eating or sleeping habits, nightmares, an unusual clinging.

Safety Support:

- Review basic safety precautions.
- Review family safety procedures so your children will feel prepared if an emergency situation occurs.
- Monitor and supervise your child's outdoor (play) activities.
- Know where your child is at all times and whom your child is with.
- Pre-arrange a place where your children should go in the event you are delayed and are not home at the end of the school day.
- Remind your child to always report any suspicious persons or activity to a trusted adult.

March 2003

In anticipation of possible staff and student reactions and classroom concerns, the following are suggestions for classroom discussion of events. Staff should be aware of their own reactions, experiences, and level of comfort in discussing the events.

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A Quick Reference for Staff

Prior to Class Notification

- Know the facts of the current events in the school/community
- Know the history of incidents in the school/classroom/community
- Time frame of those past incidents (vulnerability)

The Teacher

- Be aware of relationships within your classroom.
- Identify students who have experienced prior trauma.
- Identify “at risk” students.
- Provide effective communication and coordination with other staff, students, and parents.
- Be aware of your personal level of comfort and access support as needed.
- Limit adult discussion around students.
- Don’t search for information from students.
- Continue behavioral expectations (with understanding).
- Keep normal routine and structure (as appropriate).
- Check personal degree of trauma, grief, exposure, and functioning.

Statement (suggested to be read to students)

Recent events have caused an increase in public and school safety concerns. Prince William County Public Schools Department of Safety and Security is maintaining a high level of operations and is working together with the community to ensure everyone’s safety. (Or other appropriate communication)

Classroom

- Present the facts as you know them in a calm manner and ensure that the information you give is age appropriate
- Clarify and dispel rumor or fantasy
- Discuss reactions
- Normalize and validate feelings and reactions
- Provide support and encouragement

Recommendations for Supporting Students and School Staff During “Shelter in Place”

Ways to comfort students during crisis.

- Help students to feel secure by focusing on calming activities.
- Continue routines as much as possible to provide a feeling of security and control.
- Televisions should be turned off in elementary classrooms; use discretion in middle and high school classes.
- Consider providing books, board games, puzzles, and other activities for students.
- Be a good listener.
- Monitor free time activity and play.
- Address inappropriate anger outbursts.
- Be aware of students with special needs and concerns.
- Provide outlets for self-expression by students.
- Be positive role models for students and provide a calm environment.

Ways to comfort school staff during crisis.

- Communication – keep staff informed with current information
- Provide a respite area with food and beverages for teachers.
- Schedule time for staff breaks.
- Advance planning with the staff can help people to feel more in control when the unknown does occur.
- Accept individual staff member’s feelings and help them re-focus on what needs to be done at the moment.

Sources:

Helping Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers Deal with Children’s Concerns About Violence in the News by Fred Rogers with Hedda Bluestone Sharapan

Reactions and Guidelines for Children Following Trauma/Disaster compiled by Robin H. Gurwitch, Ph.D., Jane F. Silovsky, Ph.D., Shelli Schultz, Ph.D., Michelle Kees, Ph.D., & Sarah Burlingame, B.A.; Department of Pediatrics, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

Helping Young Children Cope with Trauma – American Red Cross Disaster Services

Talking with Children About Grief by Helen Fitzgerald, CDE: American Hospice Foundation



Prince William County Public Schools

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703-791-7200

Authorization to Administer Medications **in the event of "Shelter in Place"**

Parent or Guardian:

Many students take **critical** medications before and after the school day. Please complete the following for all **critical** medication(s) that your child should receive in the event of a **Shelter in Place** situation. **Each medication must be in its original labeled container.**

Please note that this permission slip does not replace the authorization that you previously submitted for medications that are currently administered during the school day. This form must be completed for only those **critical** medications that you administer before or after school hours.

(Example: Medications to be given before breakfast or after the evening meal.)

Child's Name: _____ **School:** _____

Grade: _____ **Birth date:** _____

Allergies: _____

Please provide the following medications to my child at the specified times:

	Medication:	Dose:	Time to give:	Special instructions:
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

Parent or Guardian signature: _____

Date: _____

Important Health Instructions for Nurses in the event of “Shelter in Place”

In response to the **Shelter in Place Memo**:

- Obtain necessary numbers of computer paper boxes with lids to store medications, non-perishable foods, and health supplies.
- Consider classroom visits to discuss health concerns for Shelter in Place, **if** approved by principal.
- Consider having large garbage bags, ziplock bags, etc, for various storage needs.
- Bring extra clothes, snacks, water and comfortable shoes for yourself.
- Consider the development of a plan in the event the restrooms are not usable or unavailable.
- Know who are your CPR- and First Aid- trained personnel.
- Consider the best site for temporary first aid, quarantine, quiet room areas.
- Have a list of students with specific health concerns and disabilities.

Consider assembling emergency bags/crisis kits:

- First aid supplies
- Tubes of cake frosting
- Student medications
- One-way resuscitation masks
- Stethoscope and B/P cuff
- Paper and pens
- Flashlights and batteries
- Copy of School Crisis Plan
- Copies of School Floor Plan

Important Health Instructions for Staff **in the event of “Shelter in Place”**

Dear Staff:

In the event of a Shelter in Place situation, it is recommended that you be prepared for up to 72 hours without outside intervention.

Emergency Information:

- Please insure that your emergency information is current, correct and on file with your principal or designee.

Medications and Health Concerns:

Consider having access to:

- A supply of your own medication(s)
- Supplies for any necessary daily treatments
- Contact lenses and supplies
- Personal hygiene items
- Non-perishable, high energy foods and snacks
- Blanket
- Flashlight and batteries
- Cell phone and charger
- Change of comfortable clothes
- Comfortable shoes

If you have additional concerns, please see your School Nurse.



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Important Health Instructions for Parents in the event of “**Shelter in Place**”

Dear Parent or Guardian:

It is our hope that we will not have to implement these procedures. However, in the interest of safety for all children, it is best that we be prepared for an emergency or **Shelter in Place** situation.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION:

- Please insure that all **emergency card information** is up to date.

MEDICATIONS:

- Many students take **critical** medications before and after the school day. In order for school personnel to be able to administer medications to your child for up to 72 hours, **the enclosed form MUST be completed and returned to the school along with the necessary medications.**
- **Each medication must be in its original labeled container.**
- **Only** medications that are **critical** to your child’s health should be brought to school. This is a decision between you and your health care provider.

SPECIAL DIETS:

- To manage some health conditions such as diabetes or food allergies, specific foods may be needed. Students on special diets need to have up to a 72-hour supply of non-perishable food. Please provide non-perishable foods, **only if** your child requires a special diet. Please place foods in a bag or container and label with your child’s name.

HEALTH PROCEDURES AND TREATMENTS:

- Students requiring nursing procedures and treatments, such as gastrostomy tube feedings or suctioning also need to be prepared for shelter in place. Please provide instructions, in writing, for any procedures or treatments your child requires before and after school.

Please help us be prepared to take care of your child in the event of an emergency or shelter in place situation. For additional information, please contact your school nurse.

Strategies for Supporting Children in Unsettling Times

For Parents

Adults need to help children feel safe, even if you are struggling with your own fears and uncertainties. What can you do to help your family develop resiliency and coping skills, while at the same time, reassuring your children that there are plans in place to be sure that their needs are being met? The following suggestion may be useful to you during these unsettling times:

- Develop an emergency plan for your family and discuss it with your children
- Reassure your children of your commitment to their safety, as well as the commitment of other significant people (teachers, relatives, friends) who can help care for them. Discuss their schools' emergency plan with your children.
- Make sure that your children's emergency cards have up-to-date information so that school personnel can contact you if necessary.
- Keep family routines as normal as possible.
- Help children communicate with letters, e-mails, and pictures if a loved one is away.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Be flexible; emphasize resiliency.
- Control the environment of your home. Limit the exposure young children (up to third grade) have to TV or discussions among adults, particularly if the child is exhibiting signs of anxiety such as crying, nightmares, and overly repetitive questions.
- Allow for dialogue. Ask your children what they're thinking or feeling about the situation and why. Do more listening than talking.
- When discussing the situation, emphasize the facts. Dispel rumors. Stress the seriousness of the situation without increasing their fears.
- Be honest with your children, but don't project your fears onto them. Children will reflect your level of anxiety. Monitor and regulate your level of anxiety and feelings.
- Be aware of your children's non-spoken language, such as facial expressions, eyes, mood, tone, and overall behavior.
- Counselors and teachers are willing and ready to help your children. Keep the lines of communication open.

Sources:

Helping Children Cope in Unsettling Times, National Association of School Psychologists
Parents Called to Active Duty, National Association of School Psychologists
Deployment Issues, American School Counselor Association, www.schoolcounselor.org